

The University of Chicago

“DISTRUST” OF IMAGINATION IN
ENGLISH NEO-CLASSICISM

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF
THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE

1934

By
DONALD FREDERIC BOND

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The neo-classical movement in England has been variously appreciated. Fuller study of the major figures and chief *genres* of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has resulted in a better understanding of the literature produced during this period. As yet, however, comparatively little investigation has been made into the aesthetic and critical doctrines of neo-classicism.¹ These find expression in the numerous contemporary treatises devoted to belles-lettres, music, the pictorial arts, architecture, and gardening.² One aspect of neo-classical theory in particular deserves attention: its view of the imagination as an element in literary composition.

The indubitably rationalistic character of the neo-classical movement has led to rather extreme statements about "repression" and "distrust" of imagination. "Fancy, provided she knows her place, is tolerated; but Imagination is kept well at a distance; a flight is perdition, a conceit at best danger."³ These words of Saintsbury are of a generation ago, yet more recent critics have likewise stressed this view. Even such a penetrating critic as Mr. A. S. P. Woodhouse, for example,⁴ speaks of "the reduction of imagination to mere 'imaging' and its function to the adornment of actual fact or of reason's concepts, in strict subordination to judgment."⁵ A recent Ger-

¹There has been, as yet, no comprehensive study of neo-classical theory in England comparable to that of M. René Bray, *La formation de la doctrine classique en France* (Paris, 1927).

²The publication of Prof. J. W. Draper's bibliography (*Eighteenth century English aesthetics: a bibliography*) (Heidelberg, 1931) has revealed how much the eighteenth century produced in the way of specific criticism to these various art forms. Cf. also the additions to Draper: R. S. C[rane] in *Modern philology*, XXIX (1931), 251-52; R. D. Havens in *Modern language notes*, XLVII (1932), 118-20; William D. Templeman, "Contributions to the bibliography of eighteenth-century aesthetics," *Modern philology*, XXX (1933), 309-16.

³George Saintsbury, *A short history of English literature* (1898), p. 565.

⁴"Collins and the creative imagination: a study in the critical background of his odes (1746)," *Studies in English by members of University College, Toronto* (Toronto, 1931), pp. 59-130.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 77.

man critic makes an even more derogatory statement of the neo-classical attitude toward poetic composition.

Man sieht in ihm nicht mehr die freie Schöpfung, sondern lediglich die regelnde Darstellung des Seienden, oder die Nachahmung der antiken Vorbilder, in denen jene Regelung schon vollzogen ist. Der Dichter muss vor allem vergleichen, abstrahieren, ordnen.⁶

But neo-classical theory is not so unqualifiedly hostile to the free play of imagination. The majority opinion, one may say at once, is that in the composition of poetry there are two essential elements—imagination, to give to a poem life and spirit; and judgment, by which the poet exercises discrimination in the selection of material.⁷ Undue stress upon either is deplored. Nor must we be misled by the frequent reproaches directed against the mischiefs of an "unbridled imagination" in ethical matters. We must distinguish between the warnings which seventeenth-century moralists direct against the free exercise of imagination (resulting in idle day-dreaming, "castles in Spain," or perhaps melancholic delusions) and the opinions which literary critics hold of this faculty. Furthermore, neo-classical "distrust" of imagination is in large part concerned not with criticism of imaginative literature (tragedy, epic, lyric poetry, etc.) at all, but with criticism of intellectual literature (eloquence, philosophy, science, etc.). The present study attempts to assemble characteristic "hostile" criticisms of the imagination from the literary criticism of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and to assess as fairly as possible the degree of "distrust" with which neo-classicists regarded the imagination, first in intellectual literature and then in imaginative literature proper.⁸

I

The seventeenth century, as has often been noted, was a period of reform in prose style. The origin and meaning of this movement toward simplicity and plainness of utterance have been variously interpreted, but the resultant effects upon the prestige of the imagination are clear. An age which held scientific truth as the great goal

⁶Hans Thüme, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Geniebegriffs in England* (Halle, 1927), p. 44.

⁷Without imagination, writes Sir William Temple, "all Poetry is flat and languishing; without the succors of Judgment 'tis wild and extravagant. . . ." (*Miscellanies*, ii [1690], in J. E. Spingarn, *Critical essays of the seventeenth century* [Oxford, 1908-09], III, 81). This collection is referred to hereafter as Spingarn.

⁸For valuable criticism in the preparation of this paper I am indebted to Prof. R. S. Crane. To Prof. George Sherburn and to Prof. R. F. Jones (who first turned my attention to the subject) I am also grateful for many helpful suggestions.

to be attained in prose would quite naturally regard with some suspicion a faculty traditionally allied with the senses and passions and devoted primarily to the making of images.⁹ We should be careful, warns one writer, "lest Imaginations (which are the Offsprings of Fancy, and do oft misrepresent the Thing) do delude us, or the Equivocation of Words draw us aside, and make us deviate from those Genuine and Nature instill'd Notions."¹⁰ And the endeavor to achieve a style of "Mathematical plainness"¹¹ for the attainment of such truth would not presuppose a favorable attitude toward a faculty long regarded as the foundation of wit and metaphor. "The proper work of man," says Isaac Barrow, "the grand drift of human life, is to follow reason, (that noble spark kindled in us from heaven . . .) not to sooth fancy, that brutish, shallow, and giddy power, able to perform nothing worthy much regard."¹²

The objection to an ornate style was, of course, not new. The Elizabethan age had witnessed the objections of men like Nashe to the frequent use of ink-horn terms, "the ingrafted ouerflow of some kil-cow conceit, that ouercloyeth their imagination . . ."¹³ or of those who, with Bacon, protested against the Ciceronian imitators, those who "began to hunt more after wordes than matter, and more after the choisenesse of the Phrase, and the round and cleane composition of the sentence, and the sweet falling of the clauses, and the varying and illustration of their workes with tropes and figures, then after the weight of matter, worth of subiect, soundnesse of argument, life of inuention, or depth of iudgement."¹⁴

Imagination, we find critics saying, tempts the writer to a round-

⁹For the psychological background the following may be consulted: Murray W. Bundy, *The theory of imagination in classical and mediaeval thought* (Urbana, Ill., 1927); and Ruth L. Anderson, *Elizabethan psychology and Shakespeare's plays* (Iowa City, 1927).

¹⁰J. S[ergeant], *The method to science* (1696), p. 6. "I that am too simple or too serious," writes Samuel Parker, "to be cajol'd with the frenzies of a bold and ungovern'd Imagination cannot be perswaded to think the Quaintest plays and sportings of wit to be any true and real knowledge" (*A free and impartial censure of the Platonick philosophie* (Oxford, 1666), p. 73). In bibliographical references London may be assumed to be the place of publication unless otherwise noted.

¹¹Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal-Society* (1667), in Spingarn, II, 118.

¹²Isaac Barrow (d. 1677), Sermon xiv, "Against foolish talking and jesting," *Theological works* (Oxford, 1830), I, 410.

¹³Preface to Greene's *Menaphon* (1589), in *Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R. B. McKerrow (1905), III, 311-12.

¹⁴*Advancement of learning* (1605), in Spingarn, I, 2.

about way of expression, to a style overladen with images. Truth needs not the ornamentation of a fanciful or metaphorical style.

How many excellent discourses are tortured, wrested, and pinched in, and obscured through curiosity of penning, hidden allusions, forced phrases, uncouth Epithites, with other deformities of plaine speaking; your own eares and eyes may be sufficient judges. . . . Good speech (make the most on't) is but the garment of truth: and she is so glorious within, she needs no outward decking: yet if [s]he do appeare in a rayment of needle-work, it's but for a more majestick comelinesse, not gawdy gaynesse. Truth is like our first Parents, most beautifull when naked. . . .¹⁵

The greatest virtues, this Puritan preacher goes on to declare, are "perspicuity" and "method." "I must alwaies think they know not what they say, who so speake, as others know not what they meane."¹⁶ This great fault, of obscurity, is that which Rapin finds in the style of Thucydides, which is "choaked with the multitude and force of his Images."¹⁷

Figures of speech, the products of wit, "whose *purlews* are chiefly words, as *matter* is of *wisdome*,"¹⁸ are moreover unsuitable for serious writing because they "rather exhibit the mask or shadow of Truth, than discover its real and substantial Beauty to us . . ."¹⁹

Now to Discourse of the Natures of Things in Metaphors and Allegories is nothing else but to sport and trifle with empty words, because these Schemes do not express the Natures of Things, but only their Similitudes and Resemblances, for Metaphors are only words, which properly signifying one thing, are apply'd to signifie another by reason of some Resemblance between them. When therefore any thing is express'd by a Metaphor or Allegory, the thing it self is not expressed, but only some similitude observ'd or made by Fancy. . . . All those Theories in Philosophie which are expressed only in metaphorical Termes, are not real Truths, but the meer Products of Imagination, dress'd up (like Childrens *babies*) in a few spangled empty words. . . . Thus their wanton & luxuriant fancies climbing up into the Bed of Reason, do not only defile it by unchast and illegitimate Embraces, but instead of real conceptions and notices of Things, impregnate the mind with nothing but Ayerie and Subventaneous Phantasmes.²⁰

Here we may see the force of the psychological objection to the imagination, which is capable of making only "corporeal images," in contrast to the abstract reasoning of the intellect. The fantastic power of the soul, says Cudworth, is never willingly idle, so that when the intellect is busy with "Abstracted Intellections and Contemplations," fancy is also busy in "making some kind of Apish Imitations, counterfeit Iconisms, Symbolical Adumbrations and Resemblances of

¹⁵William Pemble (d. 1623), "Vindiciae gratiae: a plea for grace," in *Workes* (4th ed., Oxford, 1659), p. 11.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Whole critical works* (1706), I, 274.

¹⁸Richard Flecknoe, *Miscellania* (1653), p. 99.

¹⁹Franciscus M. Van Helmont, *The spirit of diseases* (1694), Sig. A3v.

²⁰Samuel Parker, *Censure of the Platonick philosophie*, pp. 75-76.

those Intellectual Cogitations of Sensible and Corporeal things."²¹ Hence, he continues, "in Speech, Metaphors and Allegories do so exceedingly please, because they highly gratify this Phantastical Power of Passive and Corporeal Cogitation in the Soul, and seem thereby also something to raise and refresh the Mind it self, otherwise lazy and ready to faint and be tired by over-long abstracted Cogitations . . ."²²

Metaphors were "at first, no doubt, an admirable Instrument in the hands of *Wise Men*, when they were onely employ'd to describe *Goodness, Honesty, Obedience*, in larger, fairer and more moving Images; to represent *Truth*, cloth'd with Bodies; and to bring *Knowledge* back again to our very senses, from whence it was at first deriv'd to our understandings."²³ Ideally they are, as Bouhours said, "comme ces voiles transparens, qui laissent voir ce qu'ils couvrent; ou comme des habits de masque sous lesquels on reconnoist la personne qui est déguisée"²⁴; their justification is the two-fold one of making an abstract truth more clear and palpable, and of making it more agreeable to the mind.

Its beauty appears at first sight, and there is required no labour of thought to examine what truth or reason there is in it. The mind, without looking any further, rests satisfied with the agreeableness of the picture and the gaiety of the fancy. And it is a kind of affront to go about to examine it, by the severe rules of truth and good reason. . . .²⁵

But inasmuch as they are formed as "apish Imitations" by the fantastic part of the soul, they inherit a share of the distrust with which the imagination had been regarded by Platonic and Stoic thinkers,—by the former for its deceptive qualities and its inability to attain to abstract truth, by the latter for its power of stirring up the passions to revolt. Hence we find Sprat saying that "they are in open defiance against *Reason*, professing not to hold much correspondence with that, but with its Slaves, *the Passions*; they give the mind a motion too changeable and bewitching to consist with *right practice*."²⁶ "A luxurious Fancy," writes another, "will be apt to frame very wild and absurd Notions out of Metaphors, if the Understanding be not furnished with a knowledg of the qualities,

²¹Ralph Cudworth, *A treatise concerning eternal and immutable morality* (1731), pp. 144-45.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 145.

²³Sprat, *History of the Royal-Society*, in Spingarn, II, 116.

²⁴*Manière de bien penser* (2nd ed., Amsterdam, 1692), pp. 16-17. The comparison is commonly traced to Cicero, *De oratore*, book iii.

²⁵Locke, *Essay concerning human understanding* (1690), II, xi, 2.

²⁶Spingarn, II, 116-17.

operations, and use of those things from which they are drawn."²⁷

Such a style can only be suitable where pleasure rather than truth is the end. And the pleasure derived is that of a *tour de force*, "like that of seeing rope-dancers, where people take a pleasure in seeing men in danger of their lives,"²⁸ "the *Antick* Quickness and *Preternatural* Agility of *Dancers*, and *Buffoons*, and *Posture-men*."²⁹ Certainly in serious writing it has little place. "If we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness; all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats . . ."³⁰ It gains "more credit and applause with the generality of People, than that more difficult and troublesome, which after much labour and study presents us with the very truth of things drawn from their Causes, and delivers the same in distinct and plain expressions."³¹

²⁷Robert Ferguson, *The interest of reason in religion; with the import and use of Scripture-metaphors* (1675), pp. 346-47. Cf. also *Father Malebranche his treatise concerning the search after truth* (trans. T. Taylor; 2nd ed., 1700), pp. 90-99; and George Stubbes, *A dialogue in the manner of Plato, on the superiority of the pleasures of the understanding to the pleasures of the senses* (1734), pp. 52-54.

²⁸John Constable, *Reflections upon accuracy of style* (1731), p. 20.

²⁹Peter Browne, *The procedure, extent, and limits of human understanding* (1728), p. 399.

³⁰Locke, *Essay*, III, x, 34.

³¹F. M. Van Helmont, *The spirit of diseases* (1694), Sig. A3^v. There were of course other elements in the attack upon metaphors. Prof. R. F. Jones (*PMLA*, XLV [1930], 977-1009; *JEGP*, XXX [1931], 188-217; *ibid.*, XXXI [1932], 315-31) has shown the influence of the scientists in the reformation of prose style. Another element, I think, is to be found in the reaction of Restoration writers to the "Republick words" of the Puritan divines and statesmen. Jasper Mayne, in the epistle dedicatory to his *Part of Lucian made English* (Oxford, 1664), ridicules the efforts of the "self-conceited Preacher" to "goe up buskin'd into the Pulpit, and there in a Tragickall stile, and voyce as *Cothurnall*, entertain his Hearers with a *Romantick* showre of words. . . ." (Sig. A3^v). We have succeeded, he says, "a *canting* Generation of men, whose Rhetorick was as *rude*, & *mechanick* as their persons. . . ." Such "defile the English Tongue with their *Republick* words, which are most *immusickall* to the Eare, and scarce *significant* to a *Monarchicall* understanding. . . . Coyned, & minted by those *Seditious*, *Rump* Grammarians, who did put their own *impressions* to the Kings *Silver*, and so committed *Treason* against their *Prince*, and their own *rude stamp* and *sense* to their *Goth* and *Vandall* words; and so committed *Treason* against His *good people*" (Sig. A4). Samuel Parker thinks the "childish Metaphors and Allegories" characteristic of the dissenters, who "will not talk of Religion but in barbarous and uncouth Similitudes. . . ." (*A discourse of ecclesiastical politie* [1670], p. 75). He goes so far as to say that "the different Subdivisions among the Sects themselves are not so much distinguish'd by any real diversity of Opinions, as by variety of Phrases and Forms of Speech, that are the peculiar *Shibboleths* of each Tribe" (*ibid.*). Much the same kind of ridi-

II

In criticism of poetry, on the other hand, we find less insistence upon a controlled imagination, less discussion of the dangers inherent in the free play of fancy. There is general agreement that both imagination and judgment are essential. Nowhere is there the implication that imagination is not the stuff of poetry, much less that the poet could dispense with this faculty altogether. Poetry is, as Cowley said, "the *Picture* of . . . *things* and *persons* imagined."³² There are, it is true, certain ill effects which are at times ascribed to an overabundance of imagination.

In the first place, we find doubts expressed as to the value of poetry which appeals only to—or is inspired solely by—fancy.³³ The poet must instruct as well as please. Failure to remember this, says Shadwell, "makes him of as little use to Mankind as a Fidler or Dancing Master, who delights the fancy onely, without improving the Judgement. *Horace*, the best judge of Poetry, found other business for a Poet."³⁴ The greatest poetry, according to John Norris, "where equal address is made to the *Judgment* and the *Imagination*, and where *Beauty* and *Strength* go hand in hand," degenerates, like music, when it comes "down to light, frothy stuff, consisting either of mad extravagant Rants, or slight *Witticisms*, and little amorous *Conceits* . . ."³⁵ Blackmore is equally severe. "They are Men of little Genius, of mean and poor Design, that imploy their Wit for no higher Purpose than to please the Imagination of vain and wanton People."³⁶

Allied to this is the objection to poetry altogether, compounded as it is of imagination. This view was current of course among the Puritans, those

cule is cast later upon the enthusiasts. Cf. e.g., James Lowde, *A discourse concerning the nature of man*. . . (1694), pp. 34-36.

³²Preface to *Poems* (1656), in Spingarn, II, 85.

³³The terms "fancy" and "imagination" were used interchangeably throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

³⁴Preface to *The humorists* (1671), in Spingarn, II, 153. For similar views in France, see René Bray, *La formation de la doctrine classique en France*, pp. 63-84.

³⁵Preface to *A collection of miscellanies: consisting of poems, essays, discourses, and letters occasionally written by John Norris*. M.A. (Oxford, 1687), Sig. A4v.

³⁶Preface to *Prince Arthur* (1695), in Spingarn, III, 229.

Who since themselves miss'd it,
Will damn all Wit;
Such dull grim Judges, were it in their Power,
Would leave nor Heav'n a Star, nor Earth a Flower!³⁷

But it may also be regarded as a part of the large current of rationalism which pervades the period.³⁸ There are many who disparage imagination on the ground that it has to do only with the surfaces of things, and that it fails in the perception of higher, spiritual matters. To a certain extent this attitude is reflected in the rationalistic objection to poetry. As a popular courtesy book of the time puts it:

If we respect only the Senses, and their Pleasures, the Imagination, and its Charms, the Passions and their Motions; a good *Poet*, I confess, is really inestimable; because amongst the other Pleasures of the Mind, the Talent of *Poetry* is the most exquisite, especially to Persons of a delicate Fancy.

But if we will guide our selves by our Reason and its Decisions, this Quality becomes on a sudden contemptible; the pretended Charms and Excellencies of a *Poets* Wit being like those dull heavy Beauties we look on with Indifference.³⁹

Since the poet appeals to the imagination rather than to the intellect he "must be as much, if not more, imploy'd in the search of Words, and their Measure, than the nature of Things. . . . He must therefore strain himself to humour a strong Imagination rather than consult just and good Reason, and rather aim at lively Representations, than right and solid Judgment."⁴⁰

We find others urging the view that the poet should not depend upon his imagination but should base his poetry upon the solid foundation of learning. He must have a knowledge of arts and sciences and must practice the labor of the file. "To such a Poet as would aim at those noble effects, no knowledg of Morality, or the nature and course of humane actions and accidents must be wanting: he must be well versed in History, he must be acquainted with the progress of nature, in what she brings to pass, he must be deficient in no part of Logick, Rhetorick, or Grammar; in a word, he must be consummate

³⁷E. Nevill, "To the memory of Mr. William Cartwright," prefixed to Cartwright's *Comedies* (1651), Sig. ****v.

³⁸Poetry originally, remarks Senault, was in the service of virtue and encouraged mortals to glorious enterprise. "But men who corrupt the best things, did at last abuse Poetry; and did unjustly submit her unto their Passions, who had reformed them by her advice. This innocent art which had always courted virtue, is become a slave to vice" (*Of the use of passions*, trans. H. Cary [1649], p. 169).

³⁹Henry Barker, *The polite gentleman; or, reflections upon the several kinds of wit . . . Done out of French* (1700), p. 80.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

in all arts and Sciences, if he will be excellent in his way."⁴¹ Those who pretend to write "out of the treasonous mint of their owne imaginations," without the necessary background of learning, produce nothing more than "Ixion's issue."⁴² "For hee that with meerely a naturall veine, and a little vanity of nature . . . writes without other grounds of sollid learning than the best of these vngrounded rimers vnderstand or aime at, what does he more than imbrace assembled cloudes with *Ixion*, and beget only Monsters?"⁴³

All these expressions reveal a somewhat supercilious and patronizing attitude toward imagination and imaginative literature generally. More extensive and, I believe, more significant are the criticisms which point to specific ill results from the poet's imagination. In these, the necessity for imagination working in harmony with judgment is assumed: the evils remarked upon are those resulting from too great license of imagination. They are: a lack of selectiveness and a lack of probability.

The poet who trusts to fancy without judgment, says Rapin, will be led into endless digressions, like "those Travellers, who upon a long Journey are diverted and stopt by every little Thing."⁴⁴ Such was the case with Homer, who "is continually hurried away with the Impetuosity and Violence of his Imagination, to which he lets himself loose without the least Discretion."⁴⁵ If the poet needs invention,

⁴¹Sir Kenelm Digby, *Of bodies, and of mans soul* . . . (1669), part ii, p. 36 (originally published at Paris in 1644). "Tis a high presumption," writes Davenant, "to entertain a Nation (who are a Poets standing Guest, and require Monarchicall respect) with hasty provisions; as if a Poet might imitate the familiar dispatch of Faulkoners, mount his *Pegasus*, unhood his *Muse*, and with a few flights boast he hath provided a feast for a Prince" (Preface to *Gondibert* [1650], in Spingarn, II, 24). "T. P. baronet" in a commendatory poem prefixed to Cartwright's *Comedies* (1651) writes:

"No, his learn'd Phansie still was full of Light,
First study'd how, and then began to write. . . ."

Even Temple argues that "tho' Invention be the Mother of Poetry, yet this Child is like all others born naked, and must be Nourished with Care, Cloathed with Exactness and Elegance, Educated with Industry, Instructed with Art, Improved by Application, Corrected with Severity, and Accomplished with Labour and with Time, before it Arrives at any great Perfection or Growth" (*Miscellanea*, ii [1690], in Spingarn, III, 80).

⁴²Henry Reynolds, *Mythomystes* . . . (1632), in Spingarn, I, 145.

⁴³*Ibid.*, I, 148. Cf. also Davenant, Preface to *Gondibert* (1650), in Spingarn, II, 24-25; Sir Robert Howard, Preface to *Four new plays* (1665), in Spingarn, II, 102; A. Blackwall, *An introduction to the classics* (1718), pp. 7-8.

⁴⁴*Whole critical works* (1706), I, 153.

⁴⁵*Ibid.* "Tout ce qui est excessif," remarks Eudoxe in Bouhours' *Manière de bien penser* (2nd ed., Amsterdam, 1692), pp. 22-23, "est vicieux, jusqu'à la vertu, qui cesse d'estre vertu dès qu'elle va aux extrémités, & qu'elle ne garde point de mesure."

"a Capacity to discover abundantly all that may be said upon any propos'd Subject," he needs equally the faculty of judgment. "A good Judgment chuses and picks, it stops not at every thing presented by the Imagination, but discerns and discriminates betwixt what is fit to be said, and what is fit to be pass'd . . ." ⁴⁶

Neo-classical criticism of older poets often turns upon this point of lack of selectiveness, over-abundance of imagery. Lucan and Statius, Dryden notes, were "men of an unbounded imagination, but who often wanted the poise of judgment."⁴⁷ And Ovid, despite his general merit, had such imagination "that he often writ too pointedly for his subject, and made his persons speak more eloquently than the violence of their passion would admit: so that he is frequently witty out of season; leaving the imitation of Nature, and the cooler dictates of his judgment, for the false applause of Fancy."⁴⁸ Similarly Claudian is criticized by Addison for carrying his description of the destructive work of the giants to ridiculous excess. "It is visible to every judicious Reader, that such Ideas savour more of Burlesque than of the Sublime. They proceed from a Wantonness of Imagination, and rather divert the Mind than astonish it."⁴⁹ Addison then proceeds to show how Milton treated the same situation, but by uniting imagination with judgment attained "the full Majesty of *Homer* . . . improved by the Imagination of *Claudian*, without its Puerilities."⁵⁰

In more recent times it is the metaphysical poets who seem to exhibit most prominently this lack of judgment.

⁴⁶Bernard Lamy, *The art of speaking: written in French by Messieurs du Port Royal. . . . Rendred into English* (2nd ed., 1708), p. 213.

⁴⁷Preface to *The state of innocence* (1677), in Ker, I, 184. Cf. also Rapin, *Whole critical works*, I, 170.

⁴⁸Dryden, Preface to *Ovid's Epistles, translated by several hands* (1680), in Ker, I, 233-34.

⁴⁹*Spectator* 333 (March 22, 1712).

⁵⁰*Ibid.* Cf. also Shaftesbury, *Second characters* (1712), ed. B. Rand (Cambridge, 1914), pp. 143-44; Charles Gildon, *Complete art of poetry* (1718), I, 97; Bezaleel Morrice, *An essay on the poets* (1721), p. 19; Alexander Forbes, Lord Pittsligo, *Essays moral and philosophical* . . . (1734), pp. 42-43; an anonymous letter in Dodsley's *Museum*, III (March 28, 1747), 9; Johnson, *Rambler* 86 (Jan. 12, 1751); *Monthly Review*, XIV (June, 1756), 529n.; John Ogilvie, *Poems on several subjects* (1762), I, xii-xiii; *Monthly Review*, XXVIII (Feb., 1763), 148; Owen Ruffhead, *Life of Alexander Pope* (1769), pp. 458-60; Percival Stockdale, *An inquiry into the nature, and genuine laws of poetry* . . . (1778), pp. 5-11, 28-29.

Great Cowley then (a mighty genius) wrote,
 O'er-run with wit, and lavish of his thought:
 His turns too closely on the reader press:
 He more had pleas'd us, had he pleas'd us less.⁵¹

So wrote Addison in 1694. Although Cowley's first biographer thought that he had the necessary balance of judgment,⁵² neo-classical critics point to Cowley as the prime example of a poet whose fancy flowed too freely. He had, says Welsted, "so luxuriant a Fancy, that I can compare him to nothing more properly than a too rich Soil, which breeds Flowers and Weeds promiscuously, and exerts it self with so great an Exuberance, that at length it becomes Barren thro' its Fertility . . ."⁵³

The following passage from *Applebee's Journal* (June 3, 1732) illustrates the continuance of this attitude in the early eighteenth century.

Mr. Addison observes, that the Redundancy of Mr. Cowley's Wit has done him more Harm, than the Deficiency of it has done other Poets. Nor was this the Fault of Mr. Cowley alone, but of all the Authors of that Age. They were not only *inspir'd*, but *transported* with the *Furor Poeticus*. They gave the Reins to their Imagination, and swept all that could be said on a Subject with a Drag-Net; consequently a multitude of good and bad Thoughts, Sentiments and Allegories, were crowded into the same Piece.⁵⁴

Hence the necessity for rules, which are merely the formulation of such laws as antiquity had discovered to be more valuable in the production of good work. Dennis justifies them on the assumption that the art of poetry, like any other art, requires constant "practice" for perfection.

Rules are necessary even in all the inferiour Arts, as in Painting and Musick. If any one should pretend to draw a Picture without having ever been taught, or without knowing or practising any thing of Perspective or Proportion, but should pretend to succeed alone by the natural force of his Fancy, that man would certainly be esteem'd a very Impudent and Impertinent person.⁵⁵

⁵¹Addison, "An account of the greatest English poets," in *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. Guthkelch (1914), I, 32. For Cowley's reputation at this time see A. H. Nethercot, "The reputation of Abraham Cowley (1660-1800)," *PMLA*, XXXVIII (1923), 588-641.

⁵²"His Fancy," says Sprat, "flow'd with great speed, and therefore it was very fortunate to him that his Judgment was equal to manage it." Although his invention was "powerful and large," it seemed "all to arise out of the Nature of the subject, and to be just fitted for the thing of which he speaks" (*An account of the life and writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley* (1668), in Spingarn, II, 130).

⁵³Leonard Welsted, "Remarks on Longinus," appended to *The works of Dionysius Longinus, on the sublime . . .* (1712), pp. 170-71.

⁵⁴"A critique on English poets" (quoted in *Gentleman's magazine*, II (June, 1732), 787). One may note that this is simply a caveat against the abuse of imagination: "The two great Excellencies of a Poet are the Fire of his Imagination, and the Sweetness of his Stile . . ." (*ibid.*, p. 786).

⁵⁵*Advancement and reformation of modern poetry* (1701), Epistle dedicatory, Sig. [A8r-v].

Without rules, says Gildon, "all must be governed by *unruly Fancy*, and *Poetry* becomes the land of *Confusion*, which is, in Reality, the Kingdom of *Beauty, Order, and Harmony*."⁵⁶

Without the check imposed by judgment through the rules the poet may be led equally astray into the production of "loose Images, and loose Sentiments."

When the Imagination and Invention are so busy, *Reason* and *Judgment* are seldom allowed Time enough to examine the Justness of a Sentiment, and the Conclusiveness of an Argument. Many of our own Poets, the most celebrated for their Ingenuity, have been very incorrect and injudicious, as well as irreligious and immoral, in their Sentiments. They seem to have studied rather to say *fine* things than *just* ones, and have often shewn their *Fancy* at the Expense of their *Understanding*, which is buying Reputation at a very extravagant Price.⁵⁷

The imagination, which is the source of all that is fruitful in poetry, needs thus the check of judgment, so that the poet will not be betrayed into over-luxuriance. It is on this account that Dryden justifies his preference for rhyme. "The great easiness of blank verse renders the poet too luxuriant; he is tempted to say many things, which might better be omitted, or at least shut up in fewer words . . ." Some say that rhyme "is only an embroidery of sense, to make that which is ordinary in itself pass for excellent with less examination. But certainly, that which most regulates the fancy, and gives the judgment its busiest employment, is like to bring forth the richest and clearest thoughts."⁵⁸

But a more serious charge against the imagination is that it is apt to lead the poet away from the pursuit of nature, into the improbable and unnatural, tempting him, as Rapin says, "rather to speak things Wittily, than Naturally."⁵⁹ The neo-classicists, inter-

⁵⁶*Complete art of poetry* (1718), I, 91. Fancy is frequently referred to as the element in poetry which most objects to such discipline. Hildebrand Jacob writes: "There is a Kind of native *Liberty* in *Fancy*, which abhors the Chain of *Rules*, and Management of *Art*; yet it is not in human Nature to *perfect* any Thing without some *Labour*, and *Patience* . . ." (*Works* [1735], p. 415). Cf. also the ironic praise of Samuel Johnson (author of *Hurlothrumbo*) in Philip Skelton, *The candid reader* (1744), p. 30: "Rules . . . were made only for little and narrow Spirits. They are mere Leading-strings for infant Imaginations, which would tumble and grovel on the Earth without them. . . ."

⁵⁷*Weekly miscellany* (Sept. 28, 1734), quoted in *Gentleman's magazine*, IV (Sept., 1734), 499.

⁵⁸*The rival ladies* (1664), Epistle dedicatory, in Ker, I, 8. Cf. Neander's observation in the *Essay of dramatic poesy* (1668): "Judgment is indeed the master-workman in a play; but he requires many subordinate hands, many tools to his assistance. And verse I affirm to be one of these; 'tis a rule and line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwise lawless imagination would raise either irregularly or loosely" (Ker, I, 107).

⁵⁹*Whole critical works*, II, 172.

ested as they were in combatting the stylistic excesses of the metaphysical poets and in setting up a standard of taste which should contain the elements of universality, quite naturally demanded that imagination should not be allowed complete license, but that it should work in combination with judgment. While imagination was felt to be the life-giving power in poetry, it contains too many elements of change and subjectivity to furnish the sole criterion for literary excellence. "But whatever is meant by Fancy, this we must agree in, that it cannot be good and right, any farther than it is conformable to Reason, and follows it close; nor can a Man be said to have a good Fancy, but when he loves nothing but what is True, Natural, and Just."⁶⁰ Both the precept and the example of the ancients "show the ridiculous Absurdities one is apt to fall into, who follows only his Fancy; for though *Poesie* be the effect of *Fancy*, yet if this *Fancy* be not regulated, 'tis a meer *Caprice*, not capable of producing any thing reasonable."⁶¹

Such a disregard for the "nature of things" in poetry is comparable to a similar disregard in religion on the part of the dissenters. The eccentricities of the metaphysical poets were indeed associated, in the minds of the severer neo-classical critics, with the contemporary vagaries of the Puritan enthusiasts. Like the religious fanatics, such poets would let their imaginations run wild, and would pretend that poetry "is never to be school'd and *disciplin'd* by Reason; Poetry, say they, is *blind* inspiration, is pure *enthusiasm*, is *rapture* and *rage* all over."⁶² But fancy, Rymer insists, is too subjective and changeable to be a guiding force, without any control whatever.

Fancy, I think, in Poetry, is like *Faith* in Religion: it makes far discoveries, and soars above reason, but never clashes or runs against it. *Fancy* leaps and frisks, and away she's gone, whilst *reason* rattles the chains and follows after. *Reason* must consent and ratify what-ever by *fancy* is attempted in its ab-

⁶⁰Henry Barker, *The polite gentleman* (1700), p. 129. Poems "born from a flash of fancy," writes Gildon, "and applauded by fancy alone, when that was spent, vanish'd of a sudden away into forgetfulness, as all things must do, which are the product of fancy without judgment . . ." (*The laws of poetry* [1721], p. 20).

⁶¹Rapin, *Whole critical works*, II, 146. For later expressions cf. James Arbuckle, *Hibernicus's letters* (1729), I, 60; Hume, "Of simplicity and refinement in writing" (1741); *Gentleman's magazine*, XII (1742), 364-65, 479; William Melmoth, *Fitz-osborne's letters* (1748), p. 30; Richard Hurd, Commentary on Horace's *Ars poetica*, in *Works* (1811), I, 31; *The world*, No. 26 (June 28, 1753), No. 117 (March 27, 1755); Lord Kames, *Elements of criticism* (1762), III, 74-83; *Monthly review*, XXVIII (Feb., 1763), 146; etc.

⁶²Thomas Rymer, *The tragedies of the last age* (1678), in Spingarn, II, 185. "Inspiration," according to Davenant, is "a dangerous word which many have of late successfully us'd . . ." (Preface to *Gondibert*, in Spingarn, II, 25).

sence, or else 'tis all *null* and void in law. However, in the contrivance and *oeconomy* of a Play, *reason* is always principally to be consulted. Those who object against reason are the *Fanaticks* in Poetry, and are never to be sav'd by their good works.⁶³

Nature itself shows that wit or fancy is not a faculty superior to judgment. Some men speak, remarks Shadwell, "as if judgment were a less thing than wit. But certainly it was meant otherwise by nature, who subjected wit to the government of judgment. . . . In fancy mad men equal if not excel all others. . . ."⁶⁴ The writings of the early peoples, those who follow their fancy without the discipline of judgment, illustrate this. "*Fancy* with them is predominant, is wild, vast, and unbridled, o're which their *judgment* has little command or authority: hence their conceptions are monstrous, and have nothing of exactness, nothing of resemblance or proportion."⁶⁵ Rymer makes a similar criticism of Spenser.

He had a large spirit, a sharp judgment, and a *Genius* for *Heroic Poesie*, perhaps above any that ever writ since *Virgil*. But our misfortune is, he wanted a true *Idea*, and lost himself by following an unfaithful guide. Though besides *Homer* and *Virgil* he had read *Tasso*, yet he rather suffer'd himself to be misled by *Ariosto*; with whom blindly rambling on *marvellous* Adventures, he makes no Conscience of *Probability*. All is fanciful and chimerical, without any uniformity, without any foundation in truth. . . .⁶⁶

This antithesis between "wit's false mirror" and "Nature's light," as Pope later put it, is often used in judging the worth and perma-

⁶³*Tragedies of the last age*, in Spingarn, II, 185. Dryden, in the same year, makes a similar comparison, in the prologue to *Oedipus*:

But, when you lay tradition wholly by,
And on the private spirit alone rely,
You turn fanatics in your poetry.

(*Poetical works*, ed. G. R. Noyes [Boston. 1909], p. 84).

⁶⁴Preface to *The humorists* (1671), in Spingarn, II, 159.

⁶⁵Rymer, preface to translation of Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle's treatise of poesie* (1674), in Spingarn, II, 165.

⁶⁶*Ibid.* (Spingarn, II, 167-68.) Addison's lines on Spenser, in his "Account of the greatest English poets" (1694) reflect this attitude:

Old *Spenser* next, warm'd with poetick rage,
In ancient tales amus'd a barb'rous age;
An age that yet uncultivate and rude,
Where-e'er the poet's fancy led, pursu'd
Thro' pathless fields, and unfrequented floods,
To dens of dragons, and enchanted woods.

(*Miscellaneous Works*, ed. Guthkelch, I, 31.) One may compare Sir Richard Blackmore's comment, in his preface to *Prince Arthur* (1695): "But *Ariosto* and *Spencer*, however great *Wits* . . . are hurried on with a *boundless, impetuous* Fancy over Hill and Dale, till they are both lost in a Wood of Allegories,—Allegories so *wild, unnatural, and extravagant*, as greatly displease the Reader. This way of writing mightily offends in this Age. . . ." (Spingarn, III, 238.)

ment value of a writer. One of the points *The Rehearsal* makes against Bayes is his fondness for taking material from his own fancy, rather than from Nature. "I despise your Jonson and Beaumont, that borrowed all they writ from Nature: I am for fetching it purely out of my own fancy, I."⁶⁷ In conceiving a tragic character, says Rymer, "a Poet is not to leave his reason, and blindly abandon himself to follow fancy, for then his fancy might be monstrous, might be singular, and please no body's *maggot* but his own; but reason is to be his guide, reason is common to all people, and can never carry him from what is Natural."⁶⁸ This is one of the excellences of the great writers of antiquity, and one of the reasons why they retain their wide appeal. The poets, according to the classical critics, should be allowed considerable liberty in their selection of material, "provided their Draughts and their Models be fram'd and govern'd by the nature of things; they must not joyn Serpents with Doves, nor Tygers with Lambs; that is, they must not couple Contraries, and show impossible Chimaeras. This is all the Caution *Horace* gives either to Poets or Painters; he exempts nothing that is natural from the imitation of Art, nor does he set any thing out of the reach of Fancy that is within the bounds of Truth."⁶⁹

Even in works of avowed wit, Addison points out, "there is a kind of Nature that is to be observed . . . and a certain Regularity of Thought which must discover the Writer to be a Man of Sense, at the same time that he appears altogether given up to Caprice . . ."⁷⁰ In another essay he quotes Bouhours and Boileau, who have shown "That it is impossible for any Thought to be beautiful which is not just, and has not its Foundation in the Nature of Things: That the Basis of all Wit is Truth; and that no Thought can be valuable, of which good Sense is not the Ground-work."⁷¹

That this conception of art was never wholly lost sight of throughout the eighteenth century is perfectly true,⁷² but it persisted with

⁶⁷II, i, 78.

⁶⁸*The tragedies of the last age*, in Spingarn, II, 192. This, it will be remembered, is the argument of the bee in the famous apologue in *The battle of the books*.

⁶⁹R. Wolseley, Preface to *Valentinian* (1685), in Spingarn, III, 18. Cf. Hobbes, *Answer to Davenant* (1650): "Beyond the actual works of nature a Poet may now go; but beyond the conceived possibility of nature, never" (Spingarn, II, 62).

⁷⁰*Spectator* 35 (April 10, 1711).

⁷¹*Spectator* 62 (May 11, 1711).

⁷²Cf. e.g., Johnson, *Ramblers* 4, 36, 92; John Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics* (1751), pp. 17-18; John Gilbert Cooper, *Letters concerning taste* (3rd

decreasing emphasis. The great exception to this ideal was Shakespeare, and, it is to be noted, even his "irregularities" were fitted into this mould by some of the neo-classical critics. "His Imaginations," says Dennis, "were often as just, as they were bold and strong."⁷³ But it was the recognition of a new field outside and beyond nature, which Shakespeare had entered in *A midsummer-night's dream* and *The tempest*, a fairyland where imagination has complete freedom to move, without the balancing power of judgment, that was to prove in the eighteenth century an important factor in the apotheosis of the imagination. But at the height of the neo-classical period the prevailing attitude is that expressed by Henry Felton: "Our Thoughts must be conformable to the Matter and Subject that lye before us, but we have full Liberty to range, provided we can command our Fancy, and bring it home to the Purpose."⁷⁴

It is quite correct, then, to say that the neo-classical critics did see certain disadvantages in the uncontrolled imagination. The traditional association of this image-making faculty with the non-rational part of man's soul and the contrast—often assumed, if not explicitly stated—between its transitory, subjective nature and eternal, unchanging reason, were bound to find expression in critical opinion. Yet, even so, we may observe that most of the severe judgments have to do with the dangers of an unbridled imagination in prose, where exactness and unadorned truth are the aims. As to poetry, those who insist most rigidly on its utilitarian nature are likely to disparage imagination, if not all imaginative writing; but for the most part the criticism of imagination in poetry is that it tempts the poet to overabundance of expression and "unnatural" imagery. Neo-classical doctrine here, as in other fields of thought, warns against lack of balance and control. Nowhere is there the implication that poetry should be devoid of fancy or that it should be purely the product of cold reason. If neo-classical critics had little regard for poetry which was purely a "flight of fancy," neither did they recognize an art which ruled imagination out or held it in strict subordination.

ed., 1757), pp. 67-68; John Gordon, *Occasional thoughts on the study and character of classical authors* . . . (1762), pp. 85-87; Kames, *Elements of criticism* (1762), I, 282; *Monthly review*, XXVI (Jan., 1762), 41-42; Owen Ruffhead, *Life of Pope* (1769), p. 440; Percival Stockdale, *Inquiry into the nature, and genuine laws of poetry* (1778), p. 4.

⁷³An essay on the genius and writings of Shakespear (1712), p. 2.

⁷⁴A dissertation on reading the classics, and forming a just style (1713), pp. 84-85.

